

RMIT UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO

The academic acculturation experience of international students. Insights from an evaluation of the RMIT University's 'International Student Stories' website

Master of Business Research by Project

Barbara Morgan

October 2012

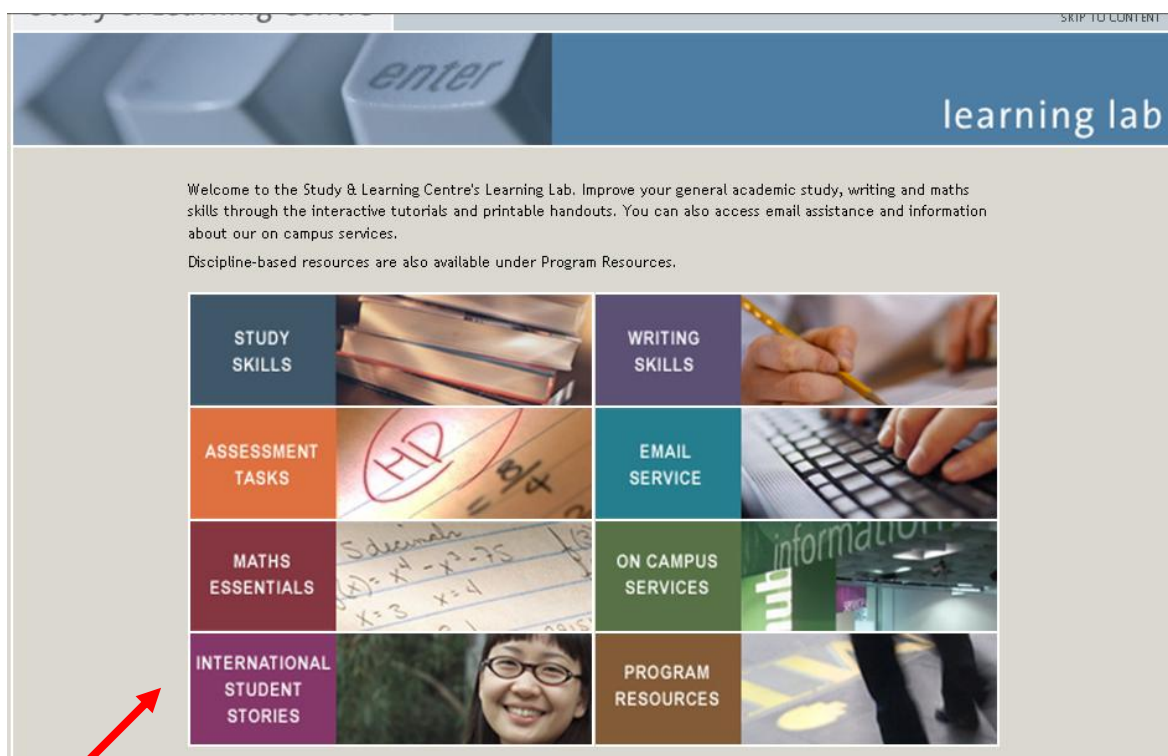
Table of Contents

Portfolio Product 1	2
‘International Student Stories’ goes live on the Learning Lab	2
Portfolio Product 2	3
‘International Student Stories’ web site- featuring four key academic areas	3
Portfolio Product 3	13
RMIT Home page media release: International students share their stories.....	13
Portfolio Product 4	15
RMIT Student News and MyRMIT promotional items	15
Portfolio Exhibit 5	16
RMIT Staff News promotional item	16
Academic Exhibit 1	17
Presentation of the ‘International Student Stories’ concept to the steering committee	17
Academic Exhibit 2	19
RMIT University Learning and Teaching Expo Experiential workshop.....	19
If I knew what I know now! International students talk about their experiences at RMIT	19
.....	19
Academic Exhibit 3	21
RMIT School of Education – Professional development conference- Cultural and Linguistic Diversity	21
.....	21
Academic Exhibit 4	23
RMIT Open Program Experiential workshop	23
‘Study Shock’ and international students, a workshop for educators.....	23
Academic Exhibit 5	25
Poster presentation Australian Technology Network Assessment Conference	25
Academic Exhibit 6	27
9 th Biennial Academic Language and Learning Conference Presentation: An evaluation of an academic acculturation website for RMIT international students. University of Queensland, November 2009	27
Academic Exhibit 7	29
Academic Language and Learning Newsletter December 2009	29
Academic Exhibit 8	31
Presentation of project to the RMIT International Student Advisory Network	31
Academic Exhibit 9	33
Integrating International Student Stories within program delivery	33
A workshop for Masters of Professional Accounting students.....	33

Portfolio Product 1

‘International Student Stories’ goes live on the Learning Lab

As part of the project the home page of the Learning Lab, (a highly successful study and learning support site) was redesigned to feature ‘International Student Stories’ on the home page. The site was launched In January 2009.



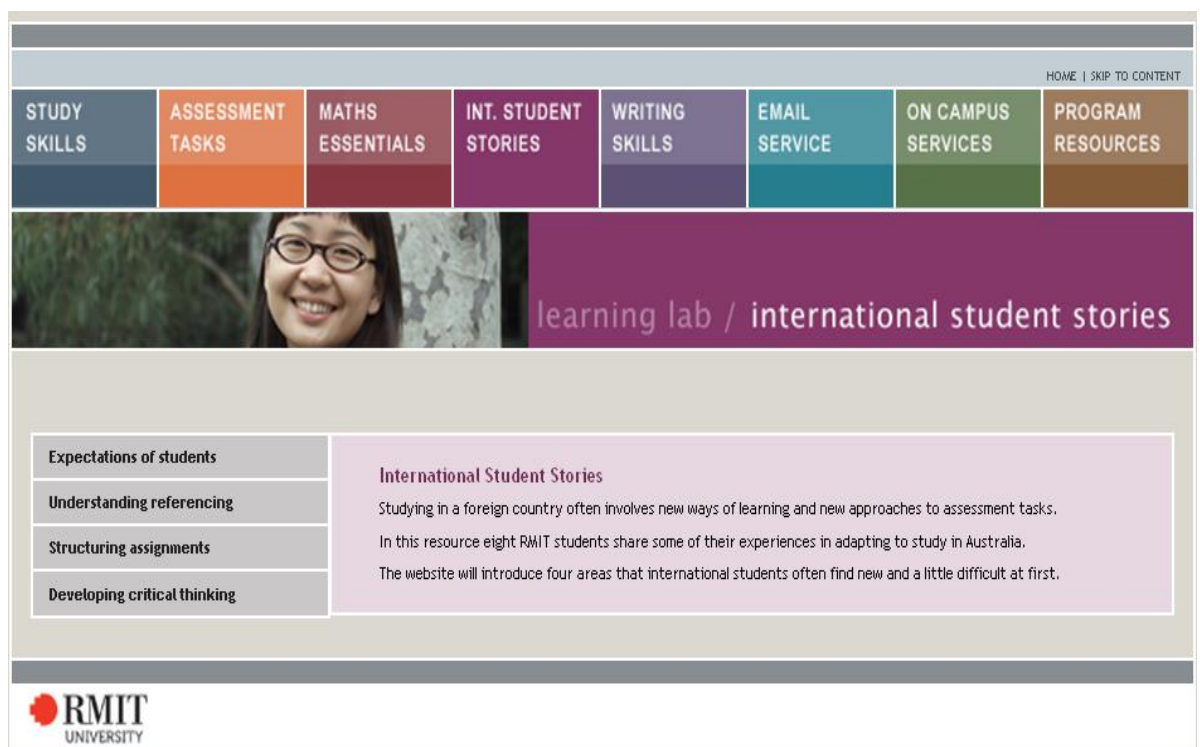
The “International Student Stories” website is located on the Learning Lab, an open accessible academic literacies and study support site for RMIT students. This site is linked to student services and staff pages, MyRMIT as well as in the Blackboard classrooms of programs and courses.

Portfolio Product 2

'International Student Stories' web site- featuring four key academic areas

The four key areas of academic study identified from initial discussions with students and confirmed in the literature were featured on the site. They are

- **Expectations of students:** the roles and responsibilities of students and teachers in Australian universities.
- **Understanding referencing:** academic integrity, intellectual property and the ownership of knowledge.
- **Structuring assignments:** the nature of tertiary discourse and writing style in Australian university settings.
- **Developing critical thinking:** the nature of critique and argument.




International Student Stories: Expectations of students: the roles and responsibilities of students and teachers in Australian universities.

“Expectations of students” is the first area of the ISS website. This section deals with the learning environment that students encounter when they embark on their program of study, specifically the roles of students and their teachers both within and external to the classroom. Highlighted in this area is the importance of independent learning as well as the expectation that students will ask questions if they don’t understand. This was an important area to be included in the web site at the project design stage as anecdotal evidence from students as well as the research literature (Volet & Renshaw 1996, Ramburuth 2001 , Hofstede 1986) indicate that adapting to new expectations in their role as students as well as the classroom environment was a significant challenge for many international students. As a result often international students are unprepared for the often informal and discursive nature of classrooms and tutorials.

International Student Stories: Expectations of students

[HOME](#) | [SKIP TO CONTENT](#)

STUDY SKILLS	ASSESSMENT TASKS	MATHS ESSENTIALS	INT. STUDENT STORIES	WRITING SKILLS	EMAIL SERVICE	ON CAMPUS SERVICES	PROGRAM RESOURCES
------------------------------	----------------------------------	----------------------------------	--------------------------------------	--------------------------------	-------------------------------	------------------------------------	-----------------------------------




learning lab / international student stories

[Expectations of students](#)
[Understanding referencing](#)
[Structuring assignments](#)
[Developing critical thinking](#)

Expectations of students

Were your experiences at RMIT different to your expectations?


Click on the students below to find out their answers.



Siphwe

[view video](#)


[read transcript](#)



Umbreen

[view video](#)


[read transcript](#)



Quan

[view video](#)


[read transcript](#)



Hans

[view video](#)

[read transcript](#)



Hui Qing


[view video](#)

[read transcript](#)

Independent learning

Many new students are surprised that they are expected to become self-directed and independent learners in Australian tertiary institutions. You will need to develop the following skills:

- The capacity to **learn without explicit direction**, for example using the library to find readings, and organising and completing your assignments.
- The ability to **work independently** and **manage your time**.

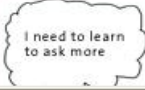


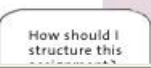
Asking questions

Some students feel uncomfortable about asking questions, perhaps because, they think they will be seen as rude, too demanding or wasting time. In Australia **staff would prefer you ask**. If you don't understand something you are expected to ask questions.

Who to ask

At RMIT there are people whose job is to help you and answer your questions. These people include:






International Student Stories: Understanding referencing: academic integrity, intellectual property and the ownership of knowledge.

The '*Understanding referencing*' section of the ISS web site examines some of the issues underpinning knowledge attribution. Specifically highlighted is how cultural differences in relation to respect and deference for authorities impact on the way many international students approach the task of referencing. The section outlines how academic writing in 'Western' cultures is based around constructing knowledge through a range of sources which must be acknowledged. This topic was considered important because, at first, international students do not understand that authors have 'ownership' of their own ideas and thus everyone who uses these ideas must acknowledge who owns them by referencing. This section of the web site aims to provide constructive rather than the punitive messages that are often associated with plagiarism as often international students are accused of plagiarizing and of copying extracts from text without appropriate acknowledgement when understanding different cultural value systems is a significant component of the problem (Volet 1999, Leask 2006, Pringle et al. 2008).

International Student Stories: Understanding referencing



learning lab / international student stories

Expectations of students

Understanding referencing


Structuring assignments

Developing critical thinking

Understanding referencing

Was referencing a new skill for you?


Click on the students below to find out their answers.



Siphiwe

[view video](#)


[read transcript](#)



Umbreen

[view video](#)


[read transcript](#)



Melkam

[view video](#)

[read transcript](#)



Hans

[view video](#)

[read transcript](#)

Why is referencing important?

In 'western' universities, academic knowledge is built around different and often competing theories. One of the roles of academics/ scholars is to research and develop their own theories, which are built on their own analysis and understanding of previous knowledge. The knowledge produced by individual academics is seen as their creation or product and therefore their intellectual property. This means:

- authors have **'ownership' of their own ideas**.
- everyone who uses these ideas **must acknowledge** who owns them. In academic writing this is done by **referring to** (or **referencing**) the 'owner' or original author.

What is expected of students?

Students are expected to:

- read widely

International Student Stories: Structuring assignments- the nature of tertiary discourse and writing style in Australian university settings.


This section of the 'International Student Stories' website elaborates on the nature of tertiary discourse and writing style, as what is required in oral and written assessment tasks is often not understood by many international students. Indeed there is considerable anecdotal evidence that international students may be 'diagnosed' with English problems when the real issue is a lack of knowledge of how to structure their work.

In '*Structuring assignments*' the student stories on the video clips are accompanied by diagrams and pictorial representations of two main cultural discourse structures for organizing text. In this section the challenges of the linear explicit and 'to the point' structure required for most tertiary assessments is compared with the more circular, indirect, digressive and inductive style that many students are accustomed to (Connor 1996, Fox 1994, Shen 1989).

International Student Stories: Structuring assignments

[HOME](#) | [SKIP TO CONTENT](#)

[STUDY SKILLS](#) | [ASSESSMENT TASKS](#) | [MATHS ESSENTIALS](#) | [INT. STUDENT STORIES](#) | [WRITING SKILLS](#) | [EMAIL SERVICE](#) | [ON CAMPUS SERVICES](#) | [PROGRAM RESOURCES](#)


 [learning lab / international student stories](#)

[Expectations of students](#)
[Understanding referencing](#)
[Structuring assignments](#)
[Developing critical thinking](#)


Structuring assignments

Was the approach to assignments different in Australia compared to your country?


Click on the students below to find out their answers.




Siphiwe
[view video](#)
[read transcript](#)



Umbreen
[view video](#)
[read transcript](#)



Trine
[view video](#)
[read transcript](#)



Luo
[view video](#)
[read transcript](#)

In Australian universities the usual focus is on introducing the main point at the beginning of an assignment task. Many other cultures prefer a logical structure that requires in-depth elaboration and context before arriving at the main point.

Assignments in Australian universities, for example, essays, reports or oral presentations require a more linear structure. This means the main ideas are introduced at the beginning, and are followed by a point by point elaboration of the key points leading to a conclusion at the end.

Linear style

Explicit Direct Deductive

Introduction

→ Introduce the Main Idea

↓

- Key point 1 (develop & elaborate)
- ↓
- Key point 2 (develop & elaborate)
- ↓
- Key point 3 (develop & elaborate)
- ↓
- Key point 4 (develop & elaborate)
- ↓
- Conclusion

No irrelevant information

Limited contextual information

Different structures for organizing information in an assignment

There are two common structures for organizing ideas. These are based on different logical structures and vary according to cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These

International Student Stories: Structuring assignments (cont.)

No irrelevant information
Limited contextual information

Different structures for organizing information in an assignment

There are two common structures for organizing ideas. These are based on different logical structures and vary according to cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These two different ways of structuring writing and presentations can be represented by two approaches to a walk in the garden.



Here's the flower. These are the main points.

Model 1: Direct linear approach

Model 1 is a simple representation of the approach to organizing information in the Australian educational context. In **Model 1** the student is expected to **present the main point first**, followed by explanation and analysis.



Here's the garden. Let me take you for a walk and I'll show you something.

Model 2: Explanation before getting to the main point

Model 2 is another representation of what is common in many other cultures. In this model the student builds a case through background information, explanation and analysis and **finally presents the main point**.

Conclusion – How to get good marks!
Many students don't realize how important the linear structure is for achieving good marks in Australian universities. Remember it is important to:

- Plan and structure your essay
- Use the linear structure

More information
[Learning Lab assessment tasks](#)

We value your feedback.
[Complete a short survey \(opens new window\)](#) about this site.

These pictures depict two main cultural discourse structures

Linear- *Here's the flower*

Let me show you the parts.

Circular – *Here's the garden. Let me take you for a walk in the garden.*

International Student Stories: Developing critical thinking- the nature of critique and argument.


Critical thinking is often considered the most difficult capability that tertiary students need to learn, yet there is often a mystique in universities associated with the concept. For many students it is a confusing notion and some international students can make the mistake of interpreting critical thinking with being 'critical' and therefore, unpleasant and disrespectful of teachers and scholars.

The '*Developing critical thinking*' section of the ISS web site attempts to demystify this concept by elaborating on the skills required for analysis, critique and argument. Integral to students developing a critical approach to their studies is the ability to ask questions of authorized knowledge (including the knowledge conveyed by their teachers) and then to make evidence based evaluations and judgments. This area was important as often students, particularly those from Asian cultures, are more accustomed to respecting rather than questioning expert knowledge. This respectful esteem and deference to the wisdom of authorities and the reluctance to challenge can hinder the development of a critical approach (Chan 1999).

International Student Stories: Developing critical thinking

[HOME](#) | [SKIP TO CONTENT](#)

STUDY SKILLS	ASSESSMENT TASKS	MATHS ESSENTIALS	INT. STUDENT STORIES	WRITING SKILLS	EMAIL SERVICE	ON CAMPUS SERVICES	PROGRAM RESOURCES
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learning lab / international student stories

- Expectations of students
- Understanding referencing
- Structuring assignments
- Developing critical thinking**


Developing critical thinking - a questioning approach

Was critical thinking a new skill for you to apply at RMIT?


Click on the students below to find out their answers.




Siphiwe
[view video](#)
[read transcript](#)



Umbreen
[view video](#)
[read transcript](#)



Trine
[view video](#)
[read transcript](#)



Hui Qing
[view video](#)
[read transcript](#)

In some cultures **being critical** is considered unpleasant and even disrespectful. However, in tertiary study critical thinking is an important skill to develop.

So what is critical thinking?

Critical thinking is about **asking questions** and then **making evaluations or judgments** and is fundamental to tertiary study. This is also called **critical analysis**. Often when students first enroll at university they are more familiar with summarizing or describing information and ideas. However, as part of a tertiary program students are expected to develop a **critical approach to their study**.

Why is critical thinking challenging?

Critical thinking is a skill which is difficult for all students. This is because students are required to develop their own judgments or views of published authors. This questioning approach may be considered disrespectful of the knowledge of published authors in some cultures. A critical approach demonstrates that the student has thought deeply about the topic.

Steps in Critical thinking

- Analyzing**
→ By **asking questions** of the material you are studying
↓
- Making judgments / evaluations to**
↓
- Developing your own position / argument** based on your readings, lectures tutorials etc in your assignments.

For example

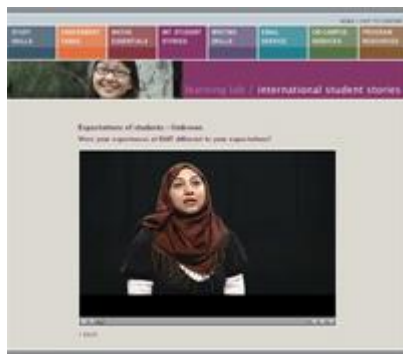
Portfolio Product 3

RMIT Home page media release: International students share their stories

The 'International Student Stories' was highlighted on the RMIT University Homepage on March 12 2009. The news item drew attention to the challenges that international students face and showcased the student stories featured on the ISS web site.

March 12, 2009

International students share their stories



The new site allows international students to share advice with newcomers.

Settling into a new country can be tough. Now RMIT University has launched a new web resource to help international students make the most of their studies.

The [International Student Stories](#) site, part of the University's Learning Lab, aims to explain academic life and expectations in Australian universities.

As Umbreen Ashraf, one of the students interviewed for the site and a Masters graduate of RMIT, put it: "What I found, which is very different over here, was the kind of learning environment in the classroom.

"It's less formal and it's less like somebody standing there in front of you and teaching you or lecturing you.

"It's more interactive, but for lots of international students it's a problem for them."

Barbara Morgan from RMIT's [Study and Learning Centre](#) oversaw the creation of the site with Dr Lynnel Hoare from the [School of Management](#) and the [Global Cities Research Institute](#).

"Studying in a foreign country often involves new ways of learning and new approaches to assessment tasks," Ms Morgan said.

"In this resource, eight experienced RMIT international students share some of their experiences and provide advice to newcomers."

The advice is focused on four areas that students often find new and a little difficult at first:

- Expectations about studying in Australia
- Structuring assignments
- Understanding referencing

- Developing critical thinking

Ms Morgan said the project aimed to ease the transition for new international students and thereby improve retention.

“For example, one mature-aged postgraduate student from south-east Asia failed his first subject and visited a counsellor after experiencing the effects of culture shock.

“After drawing on the student support services at RMIT and attending intensive workshops where he discovered that he was not alone in his confusion, he went on to gain the highest grade in the class for the next subject.

“He later worked with other new students as a ‘buddy’ to help them work through their challenges.

“He is one of the many international students who suggested the need for this web site.”

Dr Hoare said: “The literature in relation to transnational education and intercultural studies, as well as our own experiences, tell us that the process of acculturation to learning and teaching styles in Australia is a significant hurdle for international students.

“The four topics covered in the website consistently emerge as challenges that can continue throughout a student’s time in Australia unless they are able to find a key to unlock the door to good grades.

“Of course, there is a big learning curve for all new university students; but for those who are socialised in different learning environments, the ‘study shock’ can be even more significant.

“The students in the videos on the web site are sharing their own stories in their own words.

“We hope that this resource will help new international students to understand they are not alone in any initial confusion they may face and that it will help them to learn how other students have overcome the same challenges.”

Portfolio Product 4

RMIT Student News and MyRMIT promotional items

The “International Student Stories” web site was promoted to students via an open weekly news update as well as in the newly introduced MyRMIT student portal. Participants for the three focus groups were also recruited from these sources.

News item

Studying in a foreign country often involves new ways of learning and new approaches to assessment tasks. An RMIT Learning and Teaching Initiative funded project has completed a web resource that aims to inform new international students about some of the adaptations they may need to make in their acculturation to the academic culture of Australia. In this resource eight RMIT students share some of their experiences and provide advice to newcomers. The web site includes brief video clips of experienced international students sharing their own stories. The site is intended to be accessible to new students and aims to present a friendly, non-threatening sharing of advice such as ‘what I have learned about learning in Australia’; and ‘what I would have done before I arrived if I had known then what I know now’, etc.).

In the new web resource, international students talk about four areas that students often find new and a little difficult at first.

- Expectations about studying in Australia
- Structuring assignments
- Understanding referencing
- Developing critical thinking

The new resource can be found through an additional link on the SLC Learning Lab at:

http://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lisu/content/7_IntStudentStories/00stories.htm

For more information, and feedback, contact Barbara Morgan or Lynnel Hoare

Portfolio Exhibit 5

RMIT Staff News promotional item

International Student Stories was promoted in the staff weekly newsletter RMIT Update. The intention of this dissemination strategy was to encourage teaching staff to promote the web site to their incoming international students both in lectures, tutorials and in online classrooms. The secondary motivation was also to raise awareness of teaching staff of the academic acculturation issues presented on site.

RMIT Update – New resource - International student stories

Studying in a foreign country often involves new ways of learning and new approaches to assessment tasks. In this resource eight RMIT students share some of their experiences in adapting to study in Australia. The site includes mini advice segments (e.g., video clips from experienced international students such as 'what I have learned about learning in Australia'; and 'what would I have done before I arrived if I had known what I knew now' etc.).

International students talk about four areas that students often find new and a little difficult at first.

- Knowing expectations of studying in Australia
- Structuring assignments
- Understanding referencing
- Developing critical

http://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lsu/content/7_IntStudentStories/00stories.htm

Please refer your students to this resource. For more information contact Barbara Morgan or Dr Lynnel Hoare.

Academic Exhibit 1

Presentation of the 'International Student Stories' concept to the steering committee

The steering committee for the project contained representatives from the three University colleges, Science Engineering and Health, Business and Design and Social Context, the Learning and Teaching Unit, RMIT English World Wide and the Student Services Group. The committee provided input into the project design and development as well as project dissemination strategies.

Unpacking the global passport: transnational academic acculturation enhancement project for RMIT international students and their teachers

"If I knew what I know now".....international student's talk about their experiences at RMIT

Rationale

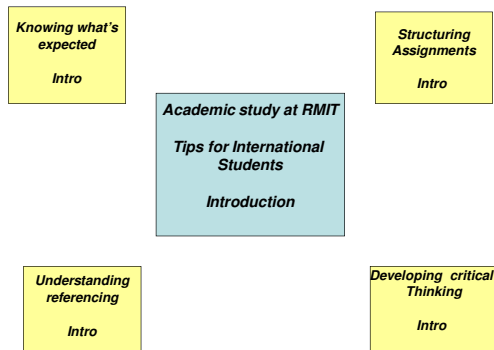
- *Understanding and acknowledging the similarities and differences is the first step to diversity management, taking action to address issues of difference is the next step...*

(Ramburuth 2001 p.13)

Literature review

- **'Study shock'** a recurring theme in the literature
- Recommendation - **make explicit** academic expectations and discourses
- Four main areas 'study shock' identified

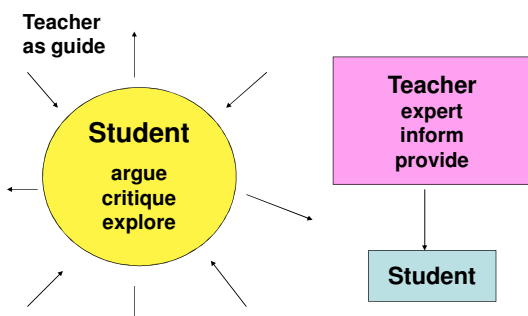
• e.g., Watkins 2000; Biggs Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee 2002; MacKinnon and Manathunga 2003; Leask 2004; Carroll and Ryan 2005; Ramburuth 2000; McLean and Ransom 2005; Dunn and Wallace 2006; Hoare 2006



Knowing what's expected
Intro

Difference between eastern & western pedagogies
↓
Role of teachers
Expectations of students
↓
Independent learning
asking questions

Learner centred or teacher centred



..... was the kind of learning environment in the classroom. It's less formal and it's less .. er .. like somebody standing there in front of you and teaching you or lecturing you .. it's more interactive

..... for lots of international students it's a problem for them .. and what happens is because they're in the habit of not participating in the class they end up staying quieter in the class which is usually mistaken by being not very knowledgeable by the lecturers .

Project participant Academic acculturation project

It's more like directing that they do, and then you do most of the learning all by yourself...they use a lot of different techniques I suppose and styles of teaching...it's very interesting and diverse".

So I think they should make an effort to participate in the class more... and let their opinions be known about anything

Project participant Academic acculturation project

Structuring Assignments Intro

Low context

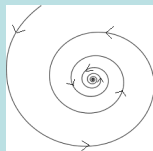
•Linear

- Explicit
- Direct
- Deductive

Main thesis
Topic sentences
Develop & elaborate
Paragraphs connected by transitions

High context

from surface to core
*digressive
*indirect & subtle
*inductive



A walk in the garden

Direct, linear approach
Here's the flower. Here's where I got it from. Now I will explain it.'



Indirect inductive approach
Explanation & elaboration before getting to the main point

Let me take you for a walk in the garden and I'll show you something '



"In the sub continent (Pakistan and India) the way we are taught to structure our essays is, we don't come to the point directly: we have to develop this major build up, before coming to the point...otherwise our lecturer won't think we have put in enough effort...but over here the thing was that 'bang' – go to the point directly and then you can start explaining ...this process of a funnel and narrowing it down was really helpful over here, and I learned a lot."

Project participant Academic acculturation project

Understanding Referencing

Intro

Why is referencing important?

What is expected of students?

I didn't realise how important referencing was for getting good marks



-but that is not that much stressed in our country. . and we believe that if you quote somebody who has already done some work and even if we repeat that person's words We are actually honouring that person.... that we are quoting his or her study

..... it was an idea which I struggled with for some time ..that when I came here a lot of international students also struggle with that and we can't seem to understand why we have to reference each and every sentence that use of any other person ... and I think knowing the reasons behind doing that is more of a problem rather than learning to do it because ...

Project participant Academic acculturation project

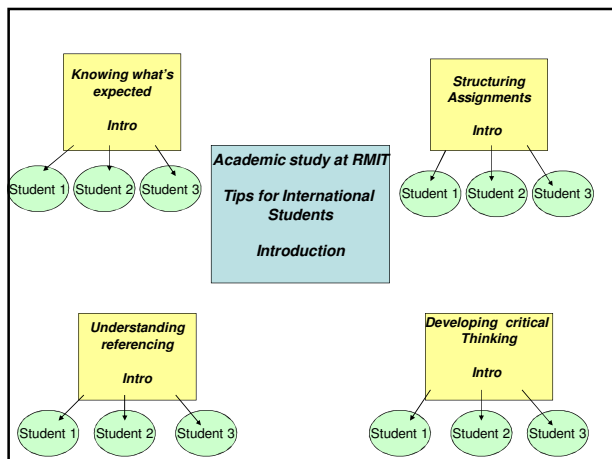
Developing critical thinking

Intro

Asking questions

?

Making judgments & evaluations



Academic Exhibit 2

RMIT University Learning and Teaching Expo Experiential workshop

If I knew what I know now! International students talk about their experiences at RMIT

The RMIT Learning and Teaching Expo showcases learning and teaching investment funded projects for that year. Dr Lynnel Hoare and myself conducted an experiential workshop which aimed to put participants “in the shoes” of their international students. The workshop involved an activity where the cultural bias of what constitutes “a good learner” and “a good teacher” was discussed. The workshop also engaged participants in a cross cultural writing task as well as their reactions to the video interviews of the acculturation experiences of student project participants.

If I knew then what I know now.....

International students talk about their experiences at RMIT

LTIF project, 2008
Barbara Morgan
Dr Lynnel Hoare

www.rmit.edu.au



What makes a good learner?

• Workshop Suggestions

What the literature tells us about 'good learner' characteristics in 'non-Western' cultures

- Respect for authorities and opinions of experts
- Willingness to be guided/ directed by teachers
- Skilled at learning through listening (an oral tradition)
- Preparedness to preserve harmony/ compromise in group situations
- Capacity to work diligently to achieve good results/ persistence
- Capacity to reproduce authorised knowledge
- The desire to fulfil a responsibility to society

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2

What makes a good teacher?

• Workshop Suggestions

What the literature tells us about student expectations of educators in various 'non-Western' cultures

- A strong moral responsibility to guide students
- Strong subject matter expertise – knows the answer to 'everything'
- Strong classroom control and prepared to use punitive measures if necessary
- Attends to student's learning needs and questions, but does so out of classroom time
- Role extends well beyond classroom and outside classroom is 'warm', personal and pastoral

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3

Structuring Constructivism

- In Asia: 'an effective teacher is viewed as someone who provides **clear guidance** for students rather than letting them flounder when exploring for themselves' (Chan, 2001)

- 'In the West, we believe in **exploring** first, then in the development of skill; the Chinese believe in skill development first' (Biggs, 1996)

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4

Selected RMIT international student perspectives on 'Western Pedagogies'

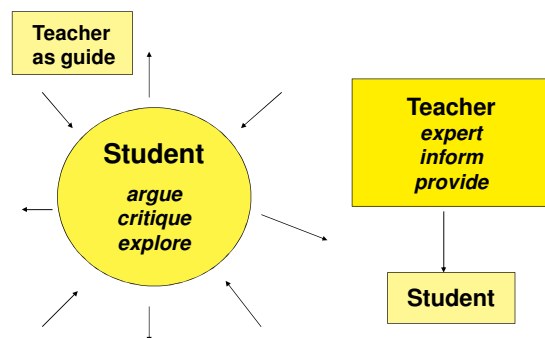
- *In Viet Nam ...you come to the classroom and the teacher will provide you with the knowledge...that they want you to learn... but here you've go to learn by yourself*
- *[In Australia] It's less formal and it's less .. er .. like somebody standing there in front of you and lecturing you .. it's more interactive*
- *[In Australia] [students] don't have to worry that they would offend the teacher or their class fellows ...*
- *[In my home country]... I always thought that what the educationalists , the academics are saying .. that I don't have to actually I don't have the capacity to actually criticise that, to add something to it, I should just believe it as such.*

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5

Learner-centred or teacher-centred?



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6

Assignment writing: style-related issues

- A small exercise....
- Consider, if you will, the following guide to essay writing.
- In small groups, or pairs, discuss or mind-map how you would construct an essay on the topic: **'Teaching and Learning at RMIT'** using the following essay writing guide.



Your Guide to Writing Essays:

1. Sentences one to six must describe who the author is, why he or she is suitable for writing this essay or what personal experience entitles the author to address this topic;
2. Sentences must not be about the topic itself, though the personal information must be linked with the topic, written in the first person and true
3. Sentences numbered seven to nine must provide background information about the topic and establish the context in which any opinion might be offered.
4. There must not yet be any views expressed about the topic itself but the background must be relevant.
5. The last sentence should hint or imply what the author thinks about the topic, perhaps using a proverb or asking a question.

West African Rules.....

1. How did you feel when attempting the task?
 2. What did you think about the 'guidelines'?
 3. If you were a student at that university, what would you need to find out if you wanted to get a good mark?
- Group Responses to question three:

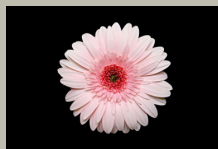


Transcript: Umbreen on essay structure (from 1:18 onward?)

- *In the sub continent (Pakistan and India) the way we are taught to structure our essays is, we don't come to the point directly: we have to develop this major build up, before coming to the point...otherwise our lecturer won't think we have put in enough effort...but over here the thing was that 'bang' – go to the point directly and then you can start explaining ...this process of a funnel and narrowing it down was really helpful over here, and I learned a lot (Ms Umbreen Ashraf, 2008).*

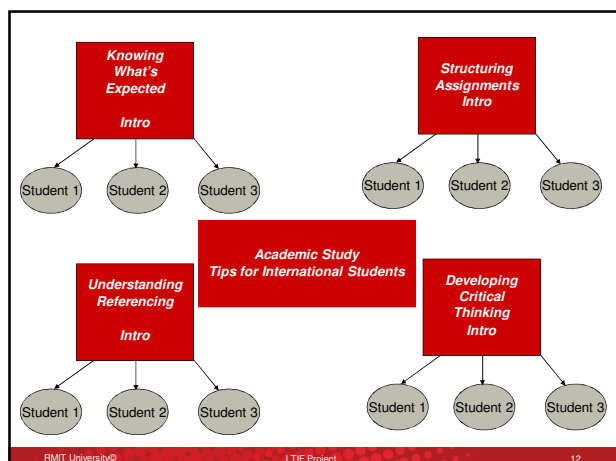
A walk in the garden

Direct, linear approach
Here's the flower. Here's where I got it from. Now I will explain it.'



Indirect, inductive approach
Explanation & elaboration before getting to the main point

Let me take you for a walk in the garden and I'll show you something '



More Examples – showcase videos

- Umbreen from 0:00 to 1:18
- Sphiwe – I would give Sphiwe the last word ☺

Sources and Inspirations

- **'Study shock'** was a recurring theme in the literature. The four main problem areas identified provided a basis for the four main areas of our website, and matched very well with the anecdotal reports of our student participants.
- Recommendation: **make** our academic expectations and discourses **explicit**
- Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee 2002;
- Biggs and Watkins, 2001;
- Carroll and Ryan 2005;
- Dunn and Wallace 2006;
- Ho, 2001;
- Hoare 2006, 2008;
- Kelly and Ha, 1998
- Lesak 2004;
- McLean and Ransom 2005;
- MacKinnon and Manathunga 2003;
- Ramburuth 2000;
- Dunn and Carroll, 2005 (thanks to Dunn & Carroll for the 'African Writing Style' exercise)

Strategies and Recommendations...

- Make academic discourses explicit
- Structuring content to aid memory– outlines & summaries
- Use models
- Stress key points
- Use transitions
- Avoid cognitive overload
- Avoid slang
- Develop a range of questioning techniques
- Use Glossaries
- Establish ground rules for discussion
- Online discussion
- Embedded Student Support classes
- **STUDENTS need to understand WHY and to be shown HOW to learn a new academic game**

Academic Exhibit 3

RMIT School of Education – Professional development conference- Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

This internal RMIT University conference for the School of Education aimed to provide teaching staff with an awareness of the issues relating to the cultural and linguistic diversity of their students. Initial evaluations of the “International Students Stories” were presented utilising data from the online questionnaire. Positive evaluations include the following

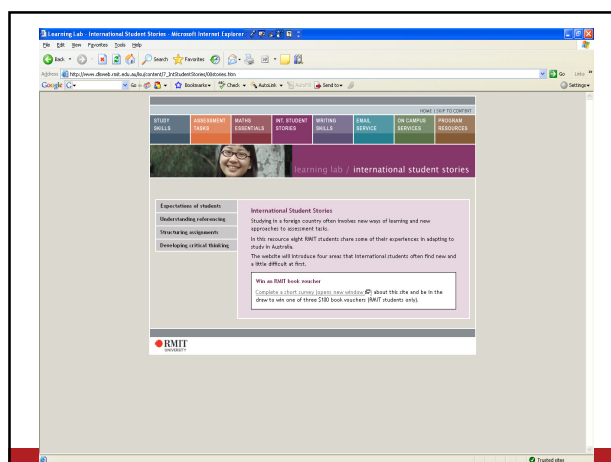
I have received positive feedback from the staff about the session - interesting and informative. I appreciate your efforts.

If I knew then what I know now.....

International students talk about their experiences at RMIT - International Student Stories

LTIF project, 2008
Barbara Morgan
Dr Lynnel Hoare

www.rmit.edu.au

Background and rationale

Understanding and acknowledging the similarities and differences is the first step to diversity management, taking action to address issues of difference is the next step.

(Ramburuth 2001, p 13)

The failure to understand the differences between educational systems and cultural value systems could be one of the reasons why a number of Asians fail to perform well in the Australian educational system.

Comment RMIT international student

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Sources and Inspirations

- 'Study shock' was a recurring theme in the literature.
- The four main problem areas identified provided a basis for the four main areas of our website, and matched very well with the anecdotal reports of our student participants.
- Recommendation: **make** our academic expectations and discourses **explicit**

- Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee 2002;
- Biggs and Watkins, 2001;
- Carroll and Ryan 2005;
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- Ho, 2001;
- Hoare 2006, 2008;
- Kelly and Ha, 1998
- Leask 2004;
- McLean and Ransom 2005;
- MacKinnon and Manathunga 2003;
- Ramburuth 2000;
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RMIT University© LTIF Project 4

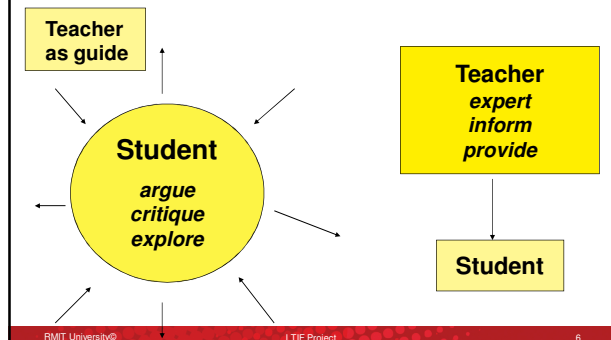
The 'International student stories' website

- **Expectations**
 - students and teachers
- **Structuring assignments** – discourse of written and oral texts
- **Referencing** - why is it important – conceptions of knowledge
- **Critical thinking**

RMIT University© LTIF Project 5

Expectations of students

- Difference between eastern & western pedagogies
- Role of teachers



RMIT University© LTIF Project 6

Structuring Assignments

Low context

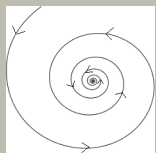
•Linear

- Explicit
- Direct
- Deductive

Main thesis
Topic sentences
Develop & elaborate
Paragraphs
connected by
transitions

High context

from surface to core
*digressive
*indirect & subtle
*inductive



A walk in the garden

Direct, linear approach

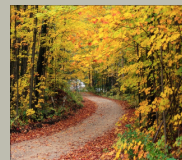
Here's the flower. Here's
where I got it from. Now I
will explain it.'



Indirect inductive approach

Explanation & elaboration before getting
to the main point

Let me take you for a walk in the garden
and I'll show you something '



International students expectations

What the literature tells us about **student expectations of educators**
in various 'non-Western' cultures

- A strong moral responsibility to guide students
- Strong subject matter expertise – knows the answer to 'everything'
- Strong classroom control and prepared to use punitive measures if necessary
- Attends to student's learning needs and questions, but does so out of classroom time
- Role extends well beyond classroom and outside classroom is 'warm', personal and pastoral

Selected RMIT international student perspectives on 'Western Pedagogies'

- *In Viet Nam ...you come to the classroom and the teacher will provide you with the knowledge...that they want you to learn... but here you've got to learn by yourself*
- *[In Australia] It's less formal and it's less .. er .. like somebody standing there in front of you and lecturing you .. it's more interactive*
- *[In Australia] [students] don't have to worry that they would offend the teacher or their class fellows ...*
- *[In my home country]... I always thought that what the educationalists, the academics are saying .. that I don't have to actually I don't have the capacity to actually criticise that, to add something to it, I should just believe it as such.*

Structuring Constructivism

- In Asia: 'an effective teacher is viewed as someone who provides **clear guidance** for students rather than letting them flounder when exploring for themselves' (Chan, 2001)
- 'In the West, we believe in **exploring** first, then in the development of skill; the Chinese believe in skill development first' (Biggs, 1996)

Transcript: Umbreen on essay structure (from 1:18 onward?)

- *In the sub continent (Pakistan and India) the way we are taught to structure our essays is, we don't come to the point directly: we have to develop this major build up, before coming to the point...otherwise our lecturer won't think we have put in enough effort...but over here the thing was that 'bang' – go to the point directly and then you can start explaining ...this process of a funnel and narrowing it down was really helpful over here, and I learned a lot (Ms Umbreen Ashraf, 2008).*

*but that is not that much stressed in our country. . and we believe that if you quote somebody who has already done some work and even if we repeat that person's words We are actually honouring that person.... that we are quoting his or her study

..... it was an idea which I struggled with for some time ..that when I came here a lot of international students also struggle with that and we can't seem to understand why we have to reference each and every sentence that use of any other person ... and I think knowing the reasons behind doing that is more of a problem rather than learning to do it because ...

Project participant Academic acculturation project

Developing critical thinking

* I always thought that what the educationalists , the academics are saying .. that is it... and I don't have to actually I don't have the capacity to actually criticise that, to add something to it, I should just believe it as such and for it was really different and er when I started writing .. I realised that there was so much that I had to say.. and that what I had to say was also important And it really helped me in doing my other assignments as well because it developed that kind of critical monologue within myself so it was really helpful I think.

* Critical thinking is something that they talk a lot about..it's more your ability to show that you have read widely .. I mean lots of literature and that you can hold the different literature up against each other and say that this is where they have stuff in common this where they are different and build on that theory....when they ask for critical thinking it's your ability to analyse the literature

More Examples – showcase videos

- * Umbreen from 0:00 to 1:18
- * Siphwe – I would give Siphwe the last word ☺

Academic Exhibit 4

RMIT Open Program Experiential workshop

'Study Shock' and international students, a workshop for educators

In August 2009 Lyn and I conducted a professional development program for staff which was advertised in the RMIT Open Program. The workshop was interactive and aimed to develop an awareness of the academic acculturation issues that international students face. In this regard the half day session was very beneficial and as one academic vowed to spread the word in her program area. Positive evaluations included the following ...

Thanks for the PowerPoint. I circulated copies of the West African directions to colleagues which has started some discussion around the place. It is all good.

.... you and Lynne were great facilitators who kept the interest and motivation high throughout the workshop, no wonder the time just flew!

'Study Shock' and international students, a workshop for educators

Barbara Morgan
Dr Lynnel Hoare

www.rmit.edu.au



Introductory activity

In pairs

Introduce yourself
and then ask each other

*What do you consider are the key capabilities
required for teachers working with international
students?*

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What makes a good learner?

• Workshop Suggestions

What the literature tells us about
'good learner' characteristics in
'non-Western' cultures

- Respect for authorities and opinions of experts
- Willingness to be guided/ directed by teachers
- Skilled at learning through listening (an oral tradition)
- Preparedness to preserve harmony/ compromise in group situations
- Capacity to work diligently to achieve good results/ persistence
- Capacity to reproduce authorised knowledge
- The desire to fulfil a responsibility to society

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3

What makes a good teacher?

• Workshop Suggestions

What the literature tells us about
student expectations of
educators in various 'non-
Western' cultures

- A strong moral responsibility to guide students
- Strong subject matter expertise – knows 'the answer to everything'
- Strong classroom control and prepared to use punitive measures if necessary
- Attends to student's learning needs and questions, but does so out of classroom time
- Role extends well beyond classroom and outside classroom is 'warm', personal and pastoral

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International student stories – Expectations of students

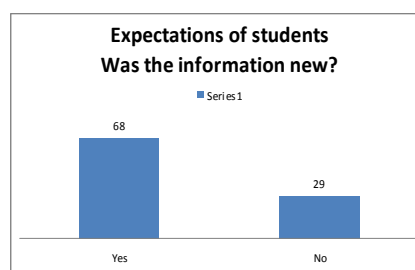
- International Student Stories - Expectations of Students Siphwe

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5

Online survey results – International Student Stories



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6

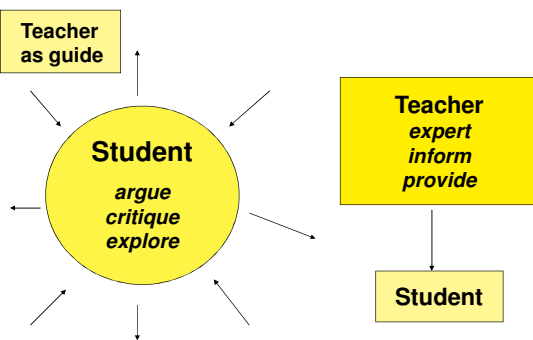
Structuring Constructivism

- In Asia: 'an effective teacher is viewed as someone who provides **clear guidance** for students rather than letting them flounder when exploring for themselves' (Chan, 2001)
- 'In the West, we believe in **exploring** first, then in the development of skill; the Chinese believe in skill development first' (Biggs, 1996)

Selected RMIT international student perspectives on 'Western Pedagogies'

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- *[In Australia] It's less formal and it's less .. er .. like somebody standing there in front of you and lecturing you .. it's more interactive*
- *[In Australia] [students] don't have to worry that they would offend the teacher or their class fellows ...*
- *[In my home country]... I always thought that what the educationalists, the academics are saying .. that I don't have to actually I don't have the capacity to actually criticise that, to add something to it, I should just believe it as such.*

Learner-centred or teacher-centred?



Assignment writing: style-related issues

- A small exercise....
- Consider, if you will, the following guide to essay writing.
- In small groups, or pairs, discuss or mind-map how you would construct an essay on the topic: **'Teaching and Learning at RMIT'** using the following essay writing guide.



Your Guide to Writing Essays:

1. Sentences one to six must describe who the author is, why he or she is suitable for writing this essay or what personal experience entitles the author to address this topic;
2. Sentences must not be about the topic itself, though the personal information must be linked with the topic, written in the first person and true
3. Sentences numbered seven to nine must provide background information about the topic and establish the context in which any opinion might be offered.
4. There must not yet be any views expressed about the topic itself but the background must be relevant.
5. The last sentence should hint or imply what the author thinks about the topic, perhaps using a proverb or asking a question.

West African Rules.....

1. How did you feel when attempting the task?
2. What did you think about the 'guidelines'?
3. If you were a student at that university, what would you need to find out if you wanted to get a good mark?

• Group Responses to question three:



Transcript: Umbreen on essay structure (from 1:18 onward?)

International student stories – Structuring assignments

- *In the sub continent (Pakistan and India) the way we are taught to structure our essays is, we don't come to the point directly: we have to develop this major build up, before coming to the point...otherwise our lecturer won't think we have put in enough effort...but over here the thing was that 'bang' – go to the point directly and then you can start explaining ...this process of a funnel and narrowing it down was really helpful over here, and I learned a lot (Ms Umbreen Ashraf, 2008).*

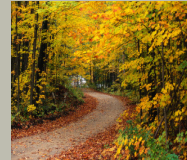
A walk in the garden

Direct, linear approach
Here's the flower. Here's where I got it from. Now I will explain it.'

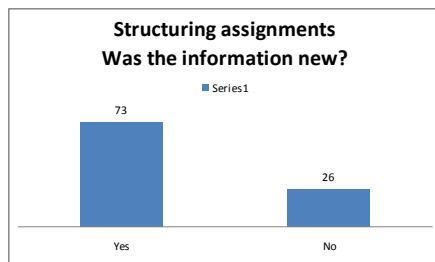


Indirect, inductive approach
Explanation & elaboration before getting to the main point

Let me take you for a walk in the garden and I'll show you something '



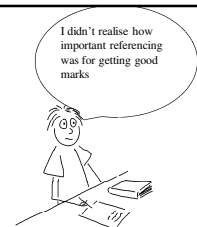
Online survey results – International Student Stories



Understanding referencing Different conceptions of knowledge

West

- Created
 - Socially constructed
- Majority cultures
- Wisdom & authority
 - Great truths that have always existed

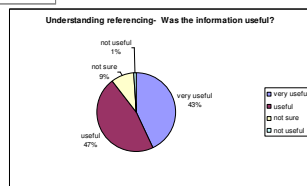
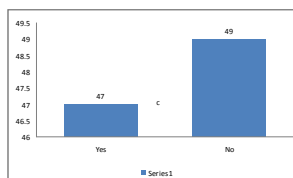


Regarding the issue of plagiarism, this conc example as you can get of a western, individualistic emic. ...the construct as defined by legalistic, individualistic and competitive Westerners is meaningless in cultures whose core values are in-group harmony, kinship and cooperation"

(Bochner, 2006)

- Understanding referencing Umbreen

Understanding referencing – online survey results



Critical thinking – What does it mean?

In pairs

Discuss and write notes on the following question

What does critical thinking mean to you?

Put yourself in the shoes of an international student.

What do you think critical thinking means to them?

Developing critical thinking

Learning a new discourse to succeed at tertiary education is about **taking on a new identity** – that of a tertiary student

- analysis
- critique
- evaluate authorities
- argue
- position yourself in the debate
- finding **your** voice
- learn the discourse (Gee 2003)
-



For an international student from a collectivist cultures taking on a new identity as an Australian tertiary student is **extremely challenging and confronting**.

- Be **your** self
- Give **your** opinion
- Write what **you** think
- Critically analyze



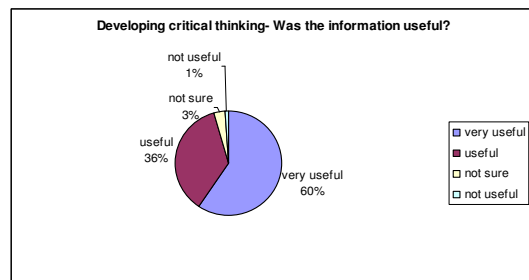
Transformation

.....when I think about my experiences in Australia the first thing that comes to my mind is **'self realization'**

International masters student

- International Student Stories- Developing critical thinking Hui Qing

Online survey results – developing critical thinking



Sources and Inspirations

- **'Study shock'** was a recurring theme in the literature. The four main problem areas identified provided a basis for the four main areas of our website, and matched very well with the anecdotal reports of our student participants.
- Recommendation: **make** our academic expectations and discourses **explicit**
- Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee 2002;
- Biggs and Watkins, 2001;
- Carroll and Ryan 2005;
- Dunn and Wallace 2006;
- Ho, 2001;
- Hoare 2006, 2008;
- Kelly and Ha, 1998
- Leask 2004;
- McLean and Ransom 2005;
- MacKinnon and Manathunga 2003;
- Ramburuth 2000;
- Dunn and Carroll, 2005 (thanks to Dunn & Carroll for the 'African Writing Style' exercise)

Strategies

In groups

Discuss strategies for working with international students

Strategies and Recommendations...

- Make academic discourses explicit
 - Structuring content to aid memory– outlines & summaries
 - Use models
 - Stress key points
 - Use transitions
 - Avoid cognitive overload
 - Avoid slang
 - Develop a range of questioning techniques
 - Use Glossaries
 - Establish ground rules for discussion
 - Online discussion
 - Embedded Student Support classes
- **STUDENTS need to understand WHY and to be shown HOW to learn a new academic game**

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Group work

Small-group work: favoured learning environment Works well in collectivist settings

Roles and status will often need to be established before full participation achieved

Establish/ negotiate **ground rules** for groups at the beginning

- first explain what ground rules are first
- Get the class to make a list
- e.g.
 - People know and use each others names
 - The procedure for speaking is clear
 - Participants know and respect who has the floor
 - Speakers have time to speak without interruption
- REVIEW** after the session

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26

Academic Exhibit 5

Poster presentation Australian Technology Network Assessment Conference

A poster presentation delivered at the Australian Technology Network of Universities at RMIT University, Melbourne in 2009. Included is the following link to You Tube video clip of the poster presentation.

<http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/atnassessment09/>

Moving across teaching and learning cultures: Assessment issues for international students

Barbara Morgan

Study and Learning Centre, RMIT University, barbara.morgan@rmit.edu.au

Anna Havir

Study and Learning Centre, RMIT University anna.havir@rmit.edu.au

Often the difficulties that international students face with their assessment tasks are attributed to poor language levels. However, academic and pedagogical acculturation issues are also a significant cause of difficulty for international students. This poster presentation will highlight evaluative research into a new academic acculturation web site for international students. Utilising data from online surveys and focus groups (accessible graphs and short quotes) the poster will focus on the difficulties that international students' face in appreciating the requirements of their assessments in a new and often alien learning and teaching environment. The research presented evaluates the effectiveness of 'International Student Stories' website as a resource for academic acculturation and transition and covers key assessment issues for international students. The site and its evaluation draws on a significant body of research on the impact of cultural styles of academic discourse on both written and oral texts. Also highlighted will be acculturation issues impacting on assessment in relation to differing cultural views of knowledge creation and attribution as well as the critical thinking requirements underpinning assessment evaluations. It is argued that the tertiary discourses need to be explicit, for the successful participation of international students

International Students

Critical factors for assessment success

An evaluation of the International Student Stories website

1. Study shock vs English language deficit

The academic difficulties of international students are primarily issues of adjustment to foreign academic cultures, values and discourses or ‘study shock’ rather than poor language skills.

This research project evaluates the effectiveness of the ‘International Student Stories’ web site as a sustainable model to acculturate international students into a new learning and teaching environment.

2. Rationale

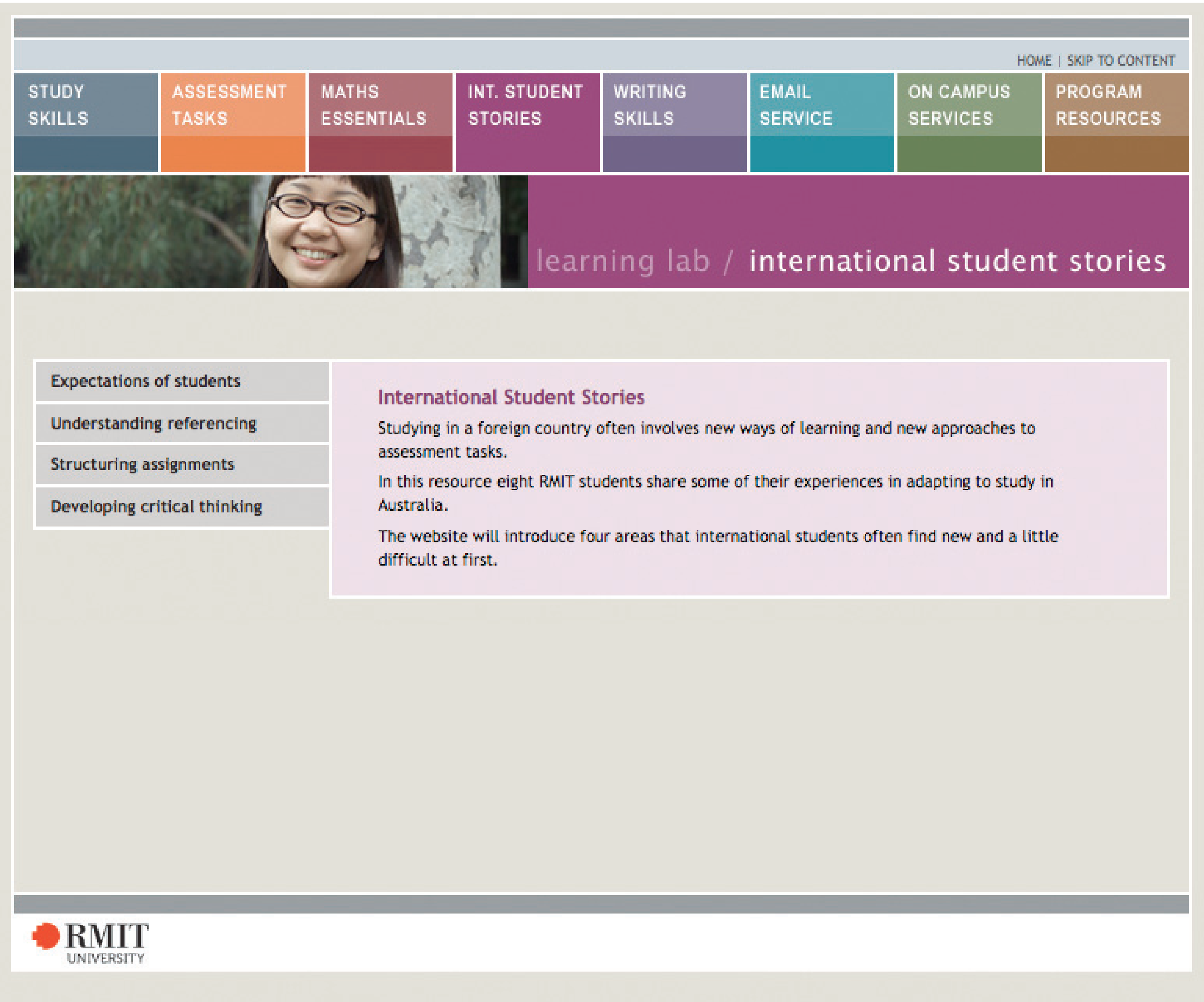
- ‘Study shock’ is a recurring theme in the literature.
- Research consistently supports interventions which make academic expectations and discourses explicit.

3. Method

Online survey and focus groups.

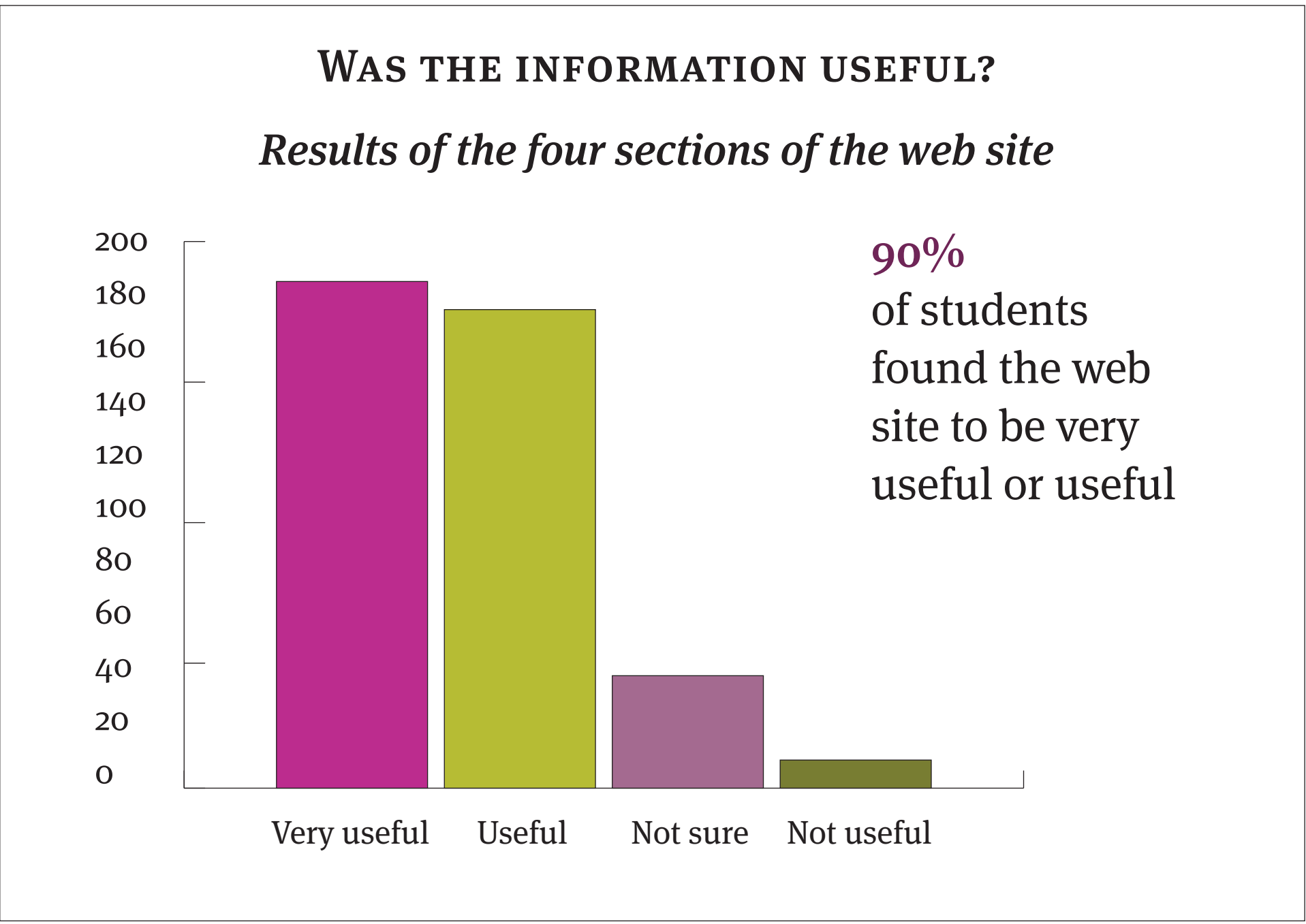
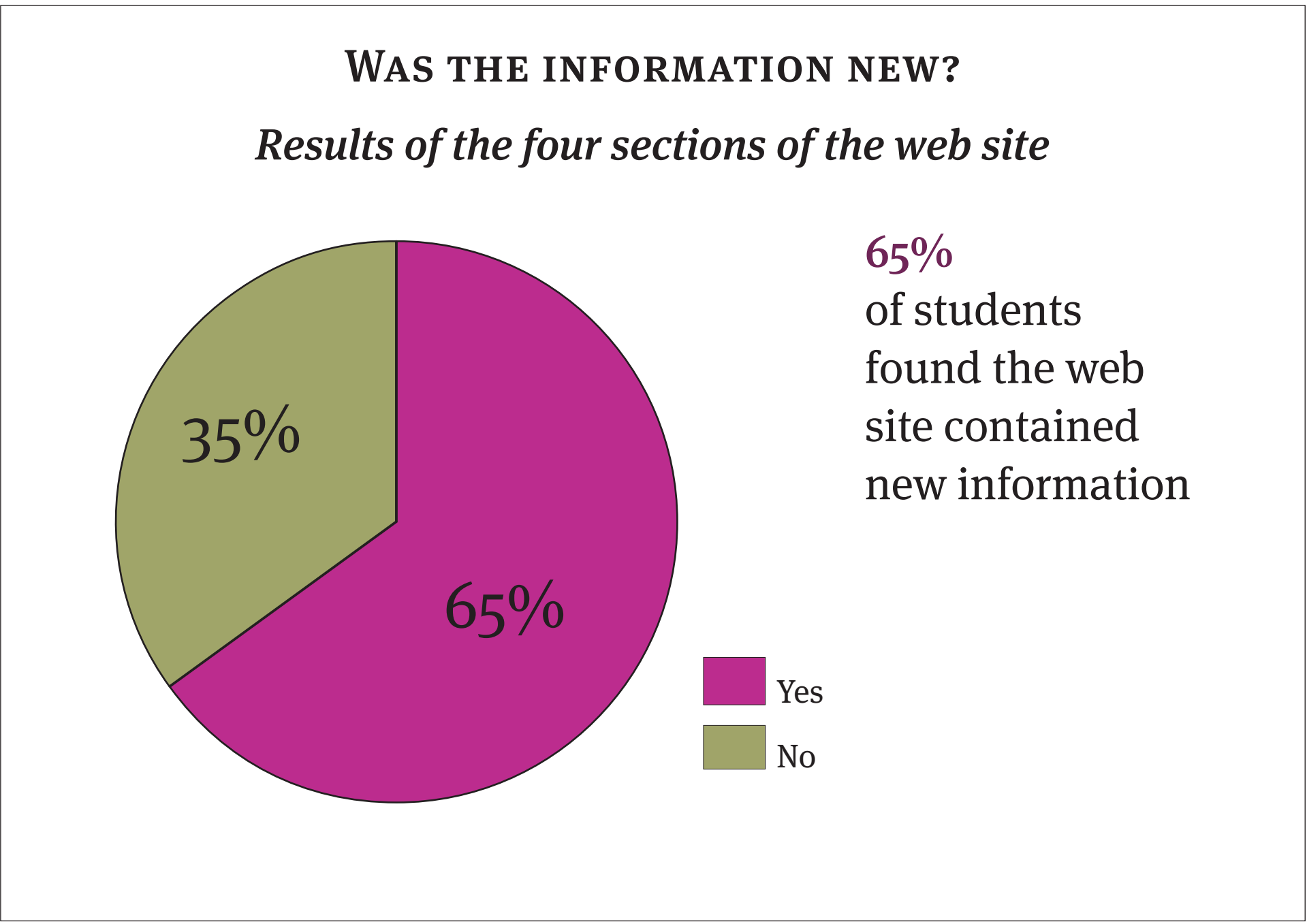
4. Main findings

- The majority of international students had no previous knowledge of Australian academic requirements regarding assignment structure (74%) and referencing (51%).
- Many were unfamiliar with the role of critical thinking in academic discourse (63%).
- Over 90% of international students found the web site to be an effective introduction to the academic demands of an Australian university.



If I had referred to this (web site) I could have avoided loss of marks.

.....All units are awesome!!!



5. Conclusion

International Student Stories is a sustainable and effective model of academic transition for international students pre and post arrival.

Project Team

Barbara Morgan, Dr Lynnel Hoare, Anna Havir

RECOMMENDED REFERENCES

International Student Stories website:
www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lsu/content/7_IntStudentStories/oostories.htm
Watkins 2000; Leask 2004; Carroll and Ryan 2005; Ramburuth 2001;
McLean and Ransom 2005; Dunn and Wallace 2006

Academic Exhibit 6

9th Biennial Academic Language and Learning Conference Presentation: An evaluation of an academic acculturation website for RMIT international students. University of Queensland, November 2009

This conference showcases initiatives of the professional body of Academic Language and Learning advisors.

Abstract

Often the difficulties that international students face in adjusting to study in Australia are attributed to poor language levels. However, academic and pedagogical acculturation issues are also a significant cause of miscommunication, misunderstanding and disappointment for international students and their teachers. This RMIT Learning and Teaching Investment Fund project was to develop an academic acculturation web site for international students. The rationale for the project was based on increasing evidence that 'study shock' is a recurring theme in the literature and hence support for interventions which make academic expectations and discourses explicit for international students. The focus of the web site 'International Student Stories' consists of mini advice segments in video clips from experienced international students focussing on the lessons they have learned studying in Australia around four key areas of academic acculturation. This workshop will briefly describe the development of the website and its implementation, showcase extracts from video clips and share evaluative research findings based on web surveys and focus groups.

Key words: Academic acculturation, international students.

An evaluation of an academic acculturation website for RMIT international students.

Barbara Morgan and Anna Havir
Study and Learning Centre
RMIT University

www.rmit.edu.au



This session will cover

1. Introduction to the International Student Stories website
2. Research project-
Evaluation of International Student Stories website

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2

1. Context- Why develop this website?

Study shock vs English language deficit

Academic difficulties of International students generally viewed as poor English language skills (eg RMIT)

However...

Issues of adjustment to foreign academic cultures values and discourses are also significant



'Study shock' recurring theme in literature

e.g., Watkins 2000; Leask 2004; Carroll and Ryan 2005; Ramburuth 2001; McLean and Ransom 2005; Dunn and Wallace 2006

The International Student Stories project- an academic acculturation website

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3

Background and rationale for the website

The failure to understand the differences between educational systems and cultural value systems could be one of the reasons why a number of Asians fail to perform well in the Australian educational system.

Comment RMIT international student

Understanding and acknowledging the similarities and differences is the first step to diversity management, taking action to address issues of difference is the next step.

(Ramburuth 2001, p 13)

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4

Developing the web site

Identified academic acculturation issues for students (literature review)



Recommendation: **make** academic expectations and discourses **explicit**

The four main problem areas identified provided a basis for the **four main areas of our website**, and matched very well with the anecdotal reports of our student participants.

Biggs and Watkins, 2001; Carroll and Ryan 2005; Dunn and Wallace 2006; Ho, 2001; Hoare 2006, 2006; Kelly and Ha, 1998; Leask 2004; McLean and Ransom 2005; MacKinnon and Marathunga 2003; Ramburuth 2000; Dunn and Carroll, 2005 (thanks to Dunn & Carroll for the 'African Writing Style' exercise)

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The four sections of the web site

Expectations

Role of students and teachers

Structuring assignments

Discourse of written and oral texts

Understanding referencing

Why? Different conceptions of knowledge- attribution

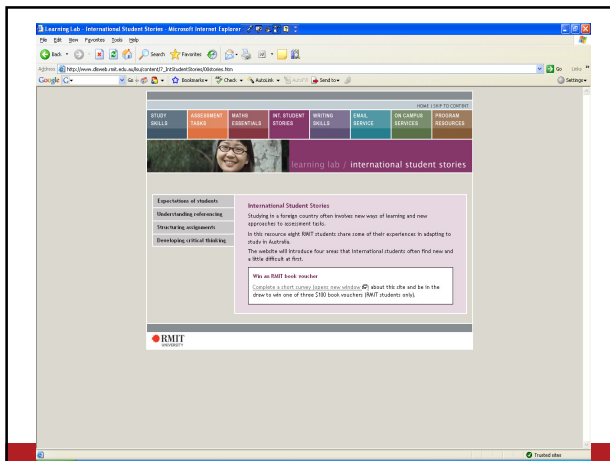
Developing critical thinking

Questioning and evaluating

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6



International Student Stories web site

- [Learning Lab - International Student Stories](#)

2. An evaluation of the International Student Stories website

This research project evaluates the effectiveness of the 'International Student Stories' website as a sustainable model to support acculturation of international students into a new learning and teaching environment.

Research questions

- How effective is an RMIT academic acculturation web site 'International Student Stories' in supporting the transition of international students to the academic culture at RMIT University?
- How could this web site be improved?

Method

Online survey

97 respondents

Focus groups

3 groups across university representative of 3 RMIT colleges and main cultural groups

Main findings 1. New Knowledge

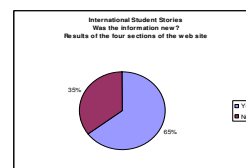
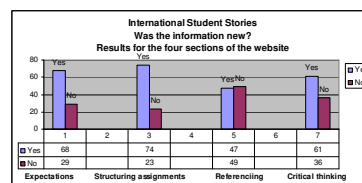
Was the information new to you?

-The majority of **international students** had **no previous knowledge** of Australian academic requirements regarding **assignment structure** (74%) and **referencing** (51%)

- Most students were **unaware** of the **expectations of students** in an Australian tertiary environment (69%)

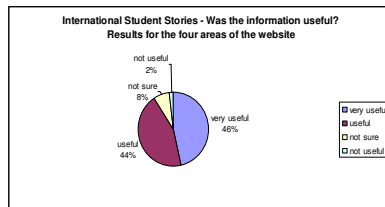
-Many were **unfamiliar** with the role of **critical thinking** in academic discourse (63%)

Was the information new?



Was the information useful?

Over 90% of international students found this website to be an **effective** introduction to the academic demands of an Australian university (critical thinking 96%)



If I had referred to this (website) I could have avoided loss of marks.

Expectations

In Viet Nam ...you come to the classroom and the teacher will provide you with the knowledge...

I learnt the information the hard way after I arrived here because the learning system is different from my country

Assignment structure

Yes sometimes we make the mistake of going aroundand then we come back to the main point...

If had referred to this (web site) I could have avoided loss of marks

Understanding referencing

..... it was an idea which I struggled with for some time ..that when I came here a lot of international students also struggle with that' and we can't seem to understand why we have to reference each and every sentence that uses (ideas) of any other person

Developing critical thinking

In my country... we assume that the information from books and lecturers is always right

Conclusion

Research question 1 Effectiveness

International Student Stories is a **sustainable** and **effective** **introductory academic transition tool** for international students pre and post arrival.

*..... very useful because it (web site) tells you the main points
Great resources which facilitate the transitionI gained a lot from this.....*

*.... all the International students should do this.....
All units are awesome!!!*

Research question 2 Improvements

Marketing and accessibility
Integrated model of support services
Online forum

Questions ?

Academic Exhibit 7

Academic Language and Learning Newsletter December 2009

The workshop that Anna Havir (RMIT language and learning advisor) and I conducted at the ALL conference at the University of Queensland was highlighted in the ALL newsletter as one of the popular presentations in the technology category.

AALL Conference: Spotlight on Technology

Technology: is it an aid or an obstacle to pedagogy? This year's AALL conference provided no definitive answer, but it certainly helped us to explore this question, with one round table, two pre-conference workshops and ten conference sessions devoted to this theme. Like most conference participants, I didn't manage to attend all of these sessions—there were so many other exciting offerings to choose from!—but I did get along to three that knocked my socks off, and caught a glimpse of another website that I can't wait to explore!

The first technology-focused presentation I saw was Kerry Hunter's 'Six degrees of separation: using pepped up PowerPoint to improve Gen Y writing skills'. Kerry demonstrated how appealing (and informative!) lecture slides can be. With suitable design, they can become powerful self-access tools, enabling us to step back from the role of 'expert guest lecturer' to 'staff developer extraordinaire'! Are we game to take up Kerry's challenge and run

the first lap of resource development, passing our prized baton to discipline staff to run solo with in class?

A second fantastic resource for student learning was displayed in Andrea Duff, Susanna Carter and Brady Spagenberg's presentation, 'The Gang's all here: Grammar goes global for Purdue and UniSA'. Since 2008, UniSA has been blogging with Purdue and with others around the world about the fascinating ways in which we use language, Aussie and American style, to convey meaning. Forget the rule books and explore how much fun grammar can be at <http://thegrammar-gang.blogspot.com/>.

Web 2.0 technologies have also been used to great effect by RMIT, as was evident in Barbara Morgan and Anna Havir's session 'An evaluation of an academic acculturation website for international students'. This website features vodcasts of international students speaking on issues important to their tran-

sition to study in Australia. These are juxtaposed with advice provided by the Study and Learning Centre. Very clever and very engaging! Click on 'International Student Stories' at <http://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lisu/> to see more.

As if all this wasn't excitement enough, the glimpse I caught of the WRiSE site during the Poster Presentation session was truly inspiring (see also "Resources" in this newsletter – Ed.). An ALTC funded collaborative project of the Universities of Sydney and New South Wales, the WRiSE site provides a wealth of interactive, fun and instructive learning material for students in engineering and science. Hats off to Helen Drury and Pam Mort for this magnificent resource! You'll find it at <http://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lisu/>.

Siri Barrett-Lenard
Vice-President, AALL

Conference Reflection

I'd like to extend a big THANK YOU to UQ and the team of dedicated ALL members who made this year's conference such a huge success. As a relatively new Learning Skills Adviser, who lives on the Western shores (considered "remote" to many!), I found the whole experience to be very inspiring. It was refreshing to meet so many enthusiastic and

dedicated colleagues from the various states of Australia and beyond. I loved sharing and comparing experiences, and hearing the first hand accounts of the amazing work that's been done.

To top it off, everyone at the conference was so friendly and I felt a real sense of connectedness. I am most grateful to AALL for the grant I

received and for the many opportunities that came with it. I had a wonderful time at the conference and can't wait for the next one in 2011!

**Lucy Reilly, The University of Western Australia
Remote Area Grant Recipient**

Conference Reflection

WHEN I EXAMINE WHAT I ENJOYED ABOUT THE AALL CONFERENCE, APART FROM THE FAMILIARITY OF DISCUSSING COMMON PROBLEMS AND DILEMMAS, I THINK THE BEST THING ABOUT THE CONFERENCE WAS THE IDENTIFICATION WITH A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE. SINCE I BEGAN WORKING IN THIS AREA, THE GROWING PROFESSIONALISM AND THE RECOGNITION THAT SOME OF OUR COLLEAGUES HAVE ACHIEVED, HAS BEEN INSPIRING.
**JAN COUNSELL,
UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA
REMOTE AREA GRANT RECIPIENT**



Lucy Reilly (UWA)

Academic Exhibit 8

Presentation of project to the RMIT International Student Advisory Network

In March 2009 the completed 'International Student Stories web site was presented to RMIT University's International Students Advisory Network. This network consisted of academic and support staff from across the university. The aim of the presentation was to promote student usage of the web site across University programs and services

If I knew then what I know now.....

International students talk about their experiences at RMIT - International Student Stories

LTIF project, 2008
Barbara Morgan
Dr Lynnel Hoare

www.rmit.edu.au



Background and rationale

Understanding and acknowledging the similarities and differences is the first step to diversity management, taking action to address issues of difference is the next step. At the institutional level, there needs to be support and resources for developing innovative strategies for diversity management, including cross cultural programs for staff and academic acculturation programs for students.

(Ramburuth 2001, p 13)

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LTIF Project

2

Background- making the implicit, explicit

The failure to understand the differences between educational systems and cultural value systems could be one of the reasons why a number of Asians fail to perform well in the Australian educational system.

Comment RMIT international student

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3

Literature review

• 'Study shock' a recurring theme in the literature

• Recommendation - **make explicit** academic expectations and discourses

• **Four main areas** 'study shock' identified

• e.g., Watkins 2000; Biggs Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee 2002; Mackinnon and Manathunga 2003; Leask 2004; Carroll and Ryan 2005; Ramburuth 2000 ;McLean and Ransom 2005; Dunn and Wallace 2006; Hoare 2006

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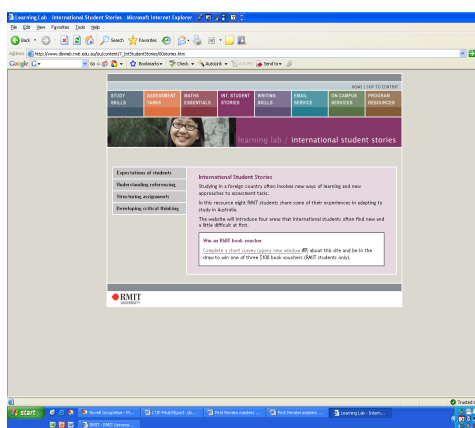
4

Expectations of students

Structuring assignments

Understanding referencing

Developing critical thinking



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5

International students expectations

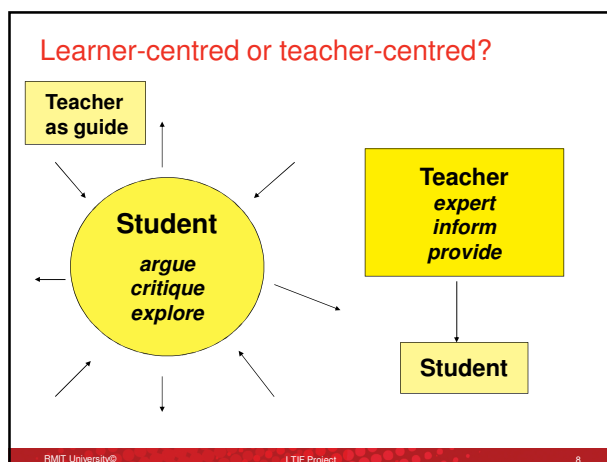
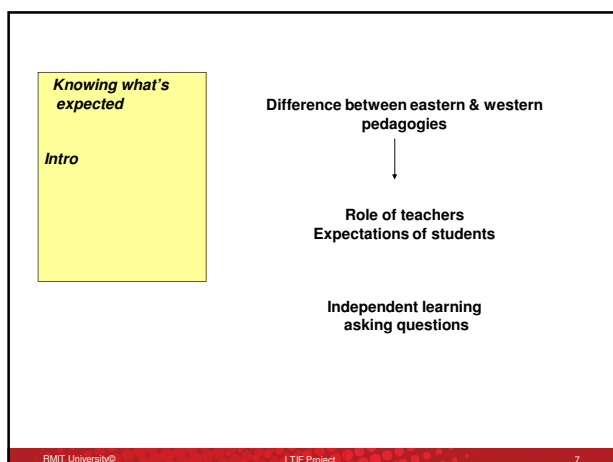
What the literature tells us about student expectations of educators in various 'non-Western' cultures

- A strong moral responsibility to guide students
- Strong subject matter expertise – knows the answer to 'everything'
- Strong classroom control and prepared to use punitive measures if necessary
- Attends to student's learning needs and questions, but does so out of classroom time
- Role extends well beyond classroom and outside classroom is 'warm', personal and pastoral

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6



Selected RMIT international student perspectives on 'Western Pedagogies'

- *In Viet Nam ...you come to the classroom and the teacher will provide you with the knowledge...that they want you to learn... but here you've go to learn by yourself*
- *[In Australia] It's less formal and it's less .. er .. like somebody standing there in front of you and lecturing you .. it's more interactive*
- *[In Australia] [students] don't have to worry that they would offend the teacher or their class fellows ...*
- *[In my home country]... I always thought that what the educationalists , the academics are saying .. that I don't have to actually I don't have the capacity to actually criticise that, to add something to it, I should just believe it as such.*

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Structuring Constructivism

- In Asia: 'an effective teacher is viewed as someone who provides **clear guidance** for students rather than letting them flounder when exploring for themselves' (Chan, 2001)
- 'In the West, we believe in **exploring** first, then in the development of skill; the Chinese believe in skill development first' (Biggs, 1996)

RMIT University© LTIF Project 10

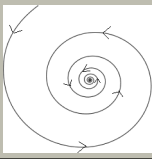
Structuring Assignments Intro

Low context

- **Linear**
- Explicit
- Direct
- Deductive

Main thesis
Topic sentences
Develop & elaborate
Paragraphs connected by transitions


High context
from surface to core
*digressive
*indirect & subtle
*inductive



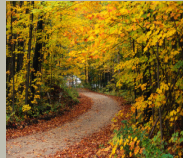
RMIT University© LTIF Project 11

A walk in the garden

Direct, linear approach
Here's the flower. Here's where I got it from. Now I will explain it.



Indirect inductive approach
Explanation & elaboration before getting to the main point
Let me take you for a walk in the garden and I'll show you something '



RMIT University© LTIF Project 12

Transcript: Umbreen on essay structure (from 1:18 onward?)

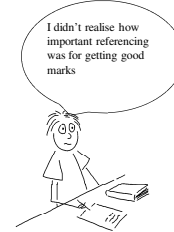
- *In the sub continent (Pakistan and India) the way we are taught to structure our essays is, we don't come to the point directly: we have to develop this major build up, before coming to the point...otherwise our lecturer won't think we have put in enough effort...but over here the thing was that 'bang' – go to the point directly and then you can start explaining ...this process of a funnel and narrowing it down was really helpful over here, and I learned a lot (Ms Umbreen Ashraf, 2008).*

Understanding referencing

Intro

Why is referencing important?

What is expected of students?



-but that is not that much stressed in our country. . and we believe that if you quote somebody who has already done some work and even if we repeat that person's words We are actually honouring that person.... that we are quoting his or her study

..... it was an idea which I struggled with for some time ..that when I came here a lot of international students also struggle with that and we can't seem to understand why we have to reference each and every sentence that use of any other person ... and I think knowing the reasons behind doing that is more of a problem rather than learning to do it because ...

Project participant Academic acculturation project

Developing critical thinking

Intro

Asking questions

?

Making judgments & evaluations

Developing critical thinking

- I always thought that what the educationalists , the academics are saying .. that is it... and I don't have to actually I don't have the capacity to actually criticise that, to add something to it, I should just believe it as such and for it was really different and er when I started writing .. I realised that there was so much that I had to say.. and that what I had to say was also important And it really helped me in doing my other assignments as well because it developed that kind of critical monologue within myself so it was really helpful I think.
- Critical thinking is something that they talk a lot about..it's more your ability to show that you have read widely .. I mean lots of literature and that you can hold the different literature up against each other and say that this is where they have stuff in common this where they are different and build on that theory.....when they ask for critical thinking it's your ability to analyse the literature

International Student Stories

• Learning Lab

More Examples – showcase videos

- Umbreen from 0:00 to 1:18
- Sphiwe – I would give Sphiwe the last word ☺

Academic Exhibit 9

Integrating International Student Stories within program delivery

A workshop for Masters of Professional Accounting students

This workshop highlights how the “International Student Stories’ website is being integrated within program delivery at RMIT University. In this program video clips from the ISS web site were utilised as part of an induction to academic culture and assignment writing in a program where nearly all students were international (mainly Chinese).

Introduction to academic writing

1. Writing in an appropriate structure
2. This task- Reflective writing

1. Assignment structure - types of assignments

You will have a range of assignments in your program
Each different type of assignment has an expected **structure** and **format** that must be followed

Common types of assignments

Reports

Presentations

Essays

Reflective writing

Today we will look at assignment structure and your first task- reflective writing

Writing in an appropriate structure

All academic writing follows a direct linear structure

Introduction

Context

What will be covered

Body

Content in
structured paragraphs

TEEEL

Conclusion

Sums up

Relates to 'big picture'



Why is writing structure important?

Easier for the audience to read (your lecturer)

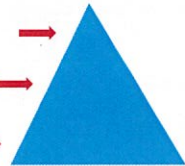
WHY?

Using the appropriate style of writing is important as it shows your knowledge of the rules of this type of writing in your specific field

Specific discipline (accounting)

Business in general

Academic writing (in Australian context)



Different cultures different discourse styles Two common discourse styles

Direct, linear approach

Here's the flower. Here's where I got it from. Now I will explain it.



Indirect inductive approach

Explanation & elaboration before getting to the main point

Let me take you for a walk in the garden and I'll show you something



Why is it important to know this?

Listen to what international students say about the differences between writing in an Australian university and their own culture

International Student Stories - Structuring Assignments

The importance of good paragraphs

The key to good writing is well structured paragraphs

WHY?

Paragraphs are the building blocks of all writing

The following TEEEL structure is a very useful model for paragraph writing?

Paragraphs structure TEEEL

Topic sentence contains main idea of paragraph

Explain why the topic is important

Evidence supports your ideas with references

Example illustrates main idea

Link back to topic

Supporting sentences

Sample paragraph TEEEL structure

The major benefit of working in a team for me was that it facilitated learning and enhanced my understanding of the project. I have definitely learned more about the topic from other students than I otherwise would if I had completed this assignment on my own. Regular and detailed team meetings are an essential part of the team process (American Marketing Association 2008). An example of this is that in our team we had regular team meetings in the library and went through each transaction together. Our team always ensured that each one of us had understood where a particular figure came from and how a particular transaction was carried forward. My team members and I felt free to share our ideas and knowledge with each other, and that definitely made my learning process more interactive, interesting and enjoyable

Topic

Explain

Evidence

Example

Link

Activity paragraph structure

Identify the TEEEL structure

The other issue we had to face while working in a team was the different background of each team member in regards to specialisation. We had accounting, international business and management students. Being an accounting student it was sometimes challenging for me to explain why a particular transaction was done in that way, not in any other. One important feature of good team work is openness to the ideas of other team members (American Marketing Association 2008). Furthermore, because of different study majors, we all had our own perspective on how a business operates, and thus what transactions should have been included. However, we were able to overcome this problem by substantial discussion, research and negotiation. In this way our different backgrounds became an asset rather than an issue.

Activity paragraph structure

Identify the TEEEL structure

The other issue we had to face while working in a team was the different background of each team member in regards to specialisation. We had accounting, international business and management students. Being an accounting student it was sometimes challenging for me to explain why a particular transaction was done in that way, not in any other. One important feature of good team work is openness to the ideas of other team members (American Marketing Association 2008). Furthermore, because of different study majors, we all had our own perspective on how a business operates, and thus what transactions should have been included. However, we were able to overcome this problem by substantial discussion, research and negotiation. In this way our different backgrounds became an asset rather than an issue.

Topic

Explain

Evidence

Example

Link

Main types of assignments

• Essays

- argued response to the question or statement

• Reports

- investigate, present and analyse information

• Reflection

- record the development of your ideas and insights; reflect on the content of the subject and on your own learning process

- Use of 'I'

2. Reflective writing

Reflective writing requires that you think deeply and write about a learning experience, in this case, your team experience.

This involves writing about:

1. What happened (**positive and negative**)
2. Why it happened, what it means & how successful it was
3. What you personally learned from the experience

How to write a reflection

Describe
What happened?

Analyse & Evaluate
What does this mean?
&
How successful was it?



Self knowledge

Structure of reflective writing

Introduction context & what is covered

Body paragraphs that integrate description, analysis & evaluation with the theory (from *Working in teams* booklet)

Conclusion sums up & what this means in the broader context



Sample introduction

Context & what is covered

In the modern world working in teams has become vital. People in every workplace talk about building teams and working as a team but few understand how to develop an effective team. To build a successful team requires a contribution from each team member and strong communication within the team. The benefits for me of working in a team were that it facilitated my learning and enhanced my communication and interpersonal skills. Through the team process we also developed useful strategies to deal with issues such as irregular attendance at meetings and the diversity of our backgrounds.

Context

What is covered

Activity introduction

Identify the context and what is covered

Team skills are essential for work in all types of industry and organisations. After almost one semester of the team working together, I feel that I have learned a lot from my team members from both the positive and negative aspects of the experience. The positive aspects were development of interpersonal skills, enhanced learning and problem solving and creative thinking. The negative aspects were irregular attendance at meetings and reliance on one team member who had a stronger accountancy background.

Activity introduction

Identify the context and what is covered

Team skills are essential for work in all types of industry and organisations. After almost one semester of the team working together, I feel that I have learned a lot from my team members from both the positive and negative aspects of the experience. The positive aspects were development of interpersonal skills, enhanced learning and problem solving and creative thinking. The negative aspects were irregular attendance at meetings and reliance on one team member who had a stronger accountancy background.

Context

What is covered

Paragraph content

Topic sentence
Outlines one positive or negative aspect of the team experience

Description
Analysis
Evaluation

Sample paragraph

Notice how the writer integrates the description, analysis & evaluation & uses the TEEEL structure

The major benefit of working in a team for me was that it facilitated learning and enhanced my understanding of the project. I have definitely learned more about the topic from other students than I otherwise would if I had completed this assignment on my own. Regular and detailed team meetings are an essential part of the team process (American Marketing Association 2008). An example of this is that in our team we had regular team meetings in the library and went through each transaction together. Our team always ensured that each one of us had understood where a particular figure came from and how a particular transaction was carried forward. My team members and I felt free to share our ideas and knowledge with each other, and that definitely made my learning process more interactive, interesting and enjoyable.

Evaluate
(Topic)

Analyse &
integrate
reference

(Explain & evidence)

Describe

(Example)

Evaluate
(Link)

Activity

Identify the description, analysis & evaluation

On the other hand, working as a team was sometimes a hard process. Problems arose for our team when one of the team members could not attend regular meetings due to a part time job. A consequence of this was that the distribution of work amongst team members was not always equitable at the beginning. This made me frustrated at first. However, we overcame this problem by allocating this team member the tasks that did not require the presence of the other team members, such as preparing financial statements and bank reconciliations. In this way we resolved the problem by reallocating the work.

Activity describe, analyse & evaluate

On the other hand, working as a team was sometimes a hard process. Problems arose for our team when one of the team members could not attend regular meetings due to a part time job. A consequence of this was that the distribution of work amongst team members was not always equitable at the beginning. This made me frustrated at first. However, we overcame this problem by allocating this team member the tasks that did not require the presence of the other team members, such as preparing financial statements and bank reconciliations. In this way we resolved the problem by reallocating the work.

Evaluate

Describe

Analyse

Describe

Evaluate

Integrating references in to your paragraph

There are two useful strategies for integrating references into your writing

1. Use appropriate reporting words/ phrases

According to Brown (2009)...

Brown (2009) reports that...

2. Use linking words/ phrases to link your ideas

In addition, consequently, however etc

Example integrating references, reporting and linking

On the other hand, working as a team was sometimes a hard process. Problems arose for our team when one of the team members could not attend regular meetings due to a part time job. A consequence of this was that the distribution of work amongst team members was not always equitable at the beginning. This made me frustrated at first. Robbins & Langton (2006), stress the importance of equitable sharing of the workload as a key factor in team success. Therefore, we overcame this problem by allocating this team member the tasks that did not require the presence of the other team members, such as preparing financial statements and bank reconciliations. In this way we resolved the problem by reallocating the work.

Activity Integrating references

Identify the topic sentence, the integrated reference, reporting words and linking words

Differing individual goals were also an issue for our team. Most of our team were not highly motivated. According to Dickie and Dickie, (2006) team morale and identity should be strongest in the performing stage resulting in high productivity. Although some students were highly motivated to excel in this project, the identity of the group related to the 'just pass' attitude therefore not holding much importance for each member. As a result we never really worked effectively together in either the 'norming' or 'performing stage' consequently only achieving the minimum. The effect of differing individual goals on team morale, identity and consequently productivity is therefore significant.

Integrating references reporting words/ phrases

Notice how the theory is integrated into the paragraph to support the main idea of low motivation within the team

Notice the use of linking words/phrases

Differing individual goals were also an issue for our team. Most of our team were *not highly motivated*. According to Dickie and Dickie, (2006) *team morale and identity* should be strongest in the performing stage resulting in high productivity. Although some students were *highly motivated* to excel in this project, the identity of the group related to the *'just pass' attitude* therefore not holding much importance for each member. As a result we never really worked effectively together in either the 'norming' or 'performing stage' and so we only achieved the minimum. Therefore the effect of differing individual goals on team morale, identity and consequently productivity is significant.

Self knowledge

In the self knowledge section you write about

1. **What you have learned** from the experience
2. **How you might use this knowledge** in the future

Example self knowledge

Notice how the writer highlights **what they have learned** about their strengths in the team and **what they need to develop for the future**

This team experience has helped me to develop a better understanding my own strengths and weaknesses in a team. Firstly, I learned that I was good at finding solutions when others were unable to move on after identifying problems. I also found that I am quite comfortable assisting others to resolve conflict. The most important skill I need to develop is confidence to communicate my ideas in a team situation. I realise that I do not readily put my ideas forward in a group and that this will be very important in my future employment. I therefore need to develop the confidence to do this effectively.

What the student has learned

What the student needs to learn

Conclusion

The conclusion does two things

It sums up what you have covered
It relates this to the broader context



Example conclusion

What was covered & what this means

In conclusion, this team work was an enjoyable and positive learning experience. Together with the accounting task I have received an invaluable lesson on how to be a good team member and to ensure that the team works efficiently. In the future, whenever I have to work in a team I will make sure that I do my part to the best of my ability and motivate my team mates to finish their work. Effective teams enable active engagement of all team members. This benefits the outcome of the work and the ultimately the efficiency of the organisation.

Sum up/
restate main points

What this means in the broader context

Useful language for reflecting

Observation

It was clear that Australian and Chinese humour differ substantially.

Speculation

The popularity of bicycles may be a significant factor in the social cohesion in Denmark, since they provide many opportunities for contact with other people

Self knowledge

This experience is an opportunity for me to become more people focused rather than task driven to help me develop into a better leader.

Activity reflect on your team process

Brainstorm your team experience

What was positive?

What was negative?

What have you learned?

For more information

Visit the SLC Learning Lab

Assessment Tasks - Reflective journal

Visit the SLC drop in centre 108.4.23

Times

Tues & Thurs 10 – 12

Mon & Wed 4 - 7